THE REAL JAPANESE INVASION OF AMERICA

Coming by Way of Manila, the Forces of Nippon Reach Bay Ridge and the Atlantic Seaboard. Stubborn Battles on the Smoothest of Battlefields—a Tennis Court

BY ADACHI KINNOSUKE

DOWN Kyushu way, in the south of Japan, there is a town called Miike. It is famous for coal—that highly proletariat member of the mineral family. Miike is about the last spot one would think of as the nesting place for so airy, so bright plumaged a thing as sport. But about five and twenty years ago a humorist fairy of the tennis world played a little trick with the coal-solid town of Miike, and the present champion of the Tennis Orient saw the light of day there for the first time.

Until his freshman year at Keiwo University in Tokio—one of the three great private universities of the empire—he had never seen a real racquet or a real tennis ball. He had toyed with large, uncovered rubber balls, such as children play with on sidewalks in America, and with many a made-in-Japan racquet as flabby as a fat man. But that was all. Kumagae graduated from the Keiwo this year; therefore, his tennis career is a wee thing of four years' fostering. It is even shorter than that—to make a sensational story still more unbelievable. For it was in the early summer of 1913 that Kumagae took up the game seriously with a real racquet and tested it and his muscles on real tennis balls with covers on them. And precisely seven months after that he went down to Manila to compete in the open tournament for the championship of the Orient.

He went down with the profound conviction of being the joke of the tournament. To be sure, there could not have been any other view for an aspirant of seven months' experience to take. Still, he had played and beaten men in the Tokio Club, and his admirers, most of them quite as young as himself, gave him an earful of high temperatured air lest he come home from Manila with a tale "How the Jelly-Fish Lost His Bones," a perfectly good tale and a prime favorite in the nurseries of Nippon, but one which his friends did not wish to make a big hit with young Kumagae in the critical hours awaiting him at Manila.

At Manila he did pretty well. His success should have astounded him. I do not know whether it did or not. Perhaps it didn't. I even hope that it didn't. I hate to think that it did not give the boy a considerably enlarged hatband. I like to think of him as a human youngster and not as a monster advertisement of monstrously impossible virtue, especially in his young and spacious days. He went on through to the semi-finals, beating such good men as W. A. B. Were, the Singapore champion (who gave him a three-set tussle)—and on Friday the ninth of January he met . . .

But let us pause right here—not for a reply, but just to let Kumagae put a white stone upon that day—for on that day he met Fottrell of San Francisco in the semi-final round of the tournament.

Fottrell beat Kumagae out in the end, of course—as he certainly should have. But it went almost to six sets. The tropic twilight darkened on them when they were at the fag end of their fourth set. Fottrell had two sets and Kumagae one, and on the fourth set Kumagae was leading 5—2 on games. The following day they took it up again. But they did not play the fourth set where they stopped. They played that set all over again from the beginning and Kumagae won it, 6—4; that made their score two sets all. Fottrell finished his opponent in the fifth, ending the match. How the San Franciscan did this is described in the heroic sentence of the Manila correspondent of "American Lawn Tennis" as follows:

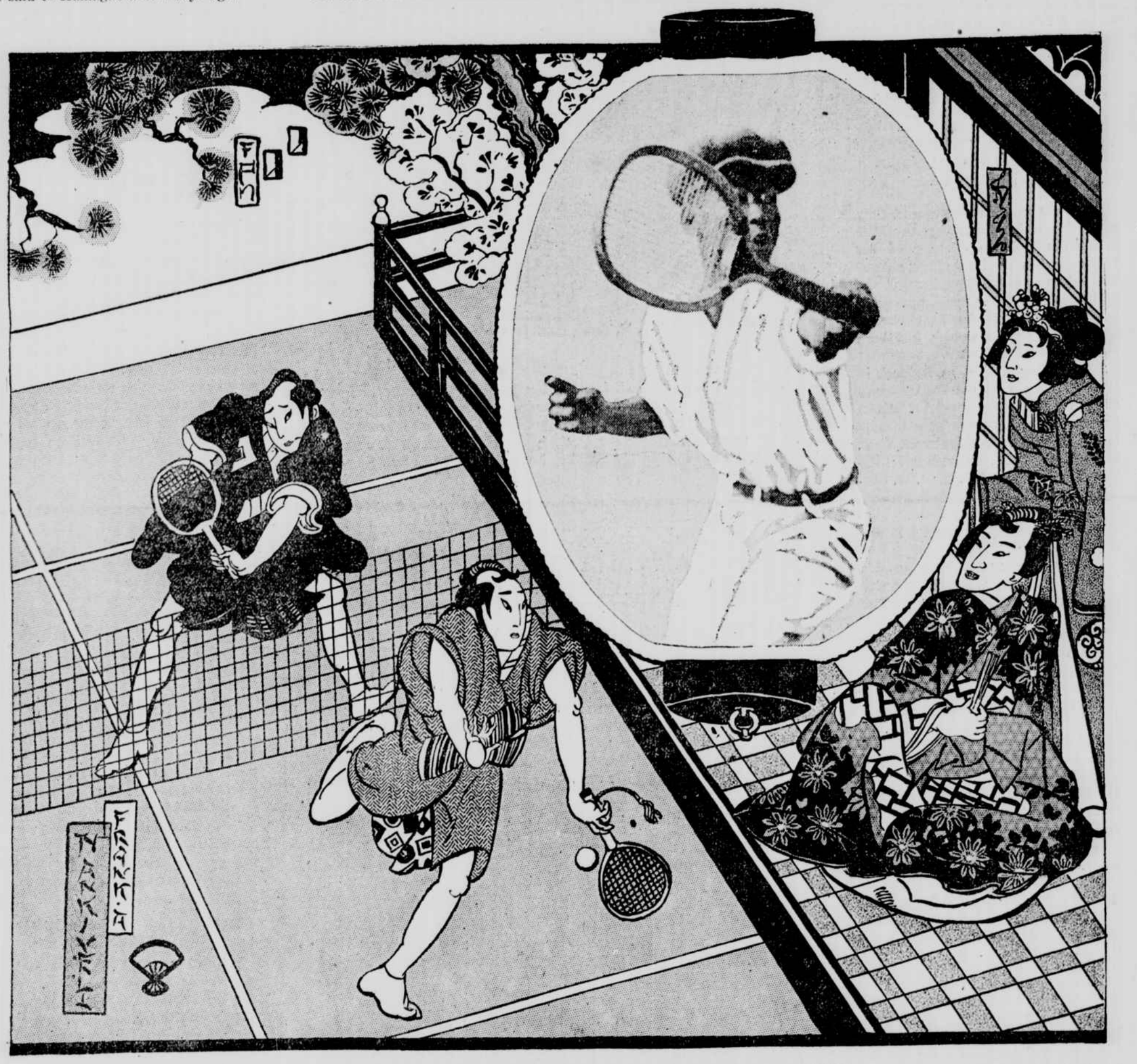
"Fottrell waded into things in the fifth set, going after everything, making impossible returns and fairly playing his plucky opponent off his feet."

To everybody familiar with Fottrell's play the showing which a Japanese boy after seven months of real tennis practice made against him sounds not merely wonderful. It sounds like a dime novel yarn or a joke of a hard-up comic supplement. Fottrell might have had a sunstroke on the day when he played Kumagae. That would have explained a trifle. But, unfortunately for the easy solution of the puzzle, Kumagae played an exhibition match against none other than the present national champion of the United States, William M. Johnston, who had defeated Fottrell in the final of the tournament, winning the championship of the Orient, the day before.

The exhibition match was played on the day following the close of the tournament, and Kumagae "forced the champion to a four-set match, three sets of which went beyond deuce." And that was the first tournament wherein Kumagae played.

The grand old man of tennis, as he is sometimes called, George Wright, an ex-national champion and the father of Beals C. Wright, was at Manila at the time of the championship meet. He saw Kumagae play and liked him; it was perhaps the promise that he saw in the youngster; perhaps it was the undownable nerve of the wee Japanese boy who stood up against reputation and experiences and never flinched.

To have this matter clear in my mind I said to Kumagae a few days ago:



Decoration by FRANK A. NANKIVELL. KUMAGAE, CHAMPION OF THE ORIENT AND OF NEW YORK STATE. Photo by Greeley Photo Service.

"And how did you feel when you went against real tennis at Manila for the first time in your young life?"

"I never learned so much in my life as I did then," said he.

So there was no question of feeling with him at all. All that fine dramatic thrill of a small featherweight freshman shouldering upon his unripened shoulders the Titan's own job of upholding the prestige of Nippon against the representatives of nearly one-half of the tennis playing world was utterly wasted on the youngster. All he was thinking of was being a freshman and inclined to be rather anxious to get his lessons well.

"It was a revelation to me," he added after a pause, "the way the Americans played, especially."

A good deal of water has passed under the bridge since the memorable Manila days when scales fell from the eyes of this young Saul of the tennis world and he saw a new light flash from the racquets of the American players there. Kumagae is now the champion of the Orient, and New York State champion, also, among other things. Still, young Saul is on the rocky road to Damascus. Not that he is fiendishly bent on massacring everybody he meets, but the zeal of mastering certain ever eely and illusive tricks of the game almost consumes his not overconspicuous person.

"I came over here," he told me, "to learn a lot of things I should know and don't. Such a thing as beating any real tennis player was entirely out of my programme. I thought everybody knew that."

There was something in the tone of his voice which sounded like a distinct echo of pained surprise.

"You have met and beaten Clarence J. Griffin three times, haven't you? If you are not sure about it, I can even give you the scores—here they are: You downed him at Manila when you put a little crown of the champion of the Orient on your fast expanding head, to the tune of 10—8; 6—3; 10—8 (I judge it wasn't a cinch from the scores), and it was 6—2; 6—0; 6—8; 3—6; 6—2 when you met him at Tokio, and in the finals at the New York State championship at Utica you won in straight sets: 6—2; 6—1; 8—6. In short, and to put it as shockingly as possible to your exquisite delicacy, you downed him every time you met him."

"On a hard court, yes. I seem to be able to hold my own on dirt courts after a fashion. But on grass it's another story. Men who are not the peer of Mr. Griffin beat me easily on grass."

I felt like, "Oh, what's the use!" Still with that grim grip on my New England sense of duty (born and bred amid the hills of Kyoto) I went straight on my deadly course: I reminded him of his five-set victory over one of the two supreme stylists of the game — Nathaniel W. Niles, of Boston. That was on grass—on the storied court of Longwood.

"Oh, but he was all worn out that day. He isn't young, as I am. And he had had a very hard match that morning before we met. And everybody said that he had an off day that time."

His modesty was offensive. I wouldn't have stood anything of the sort from an American. But I remembered that he was from Nippon; that I was from there, too, originally, although it is a standing wonder to myself how I do forget the land of my birth and its gentle manners. So I forgave him. I didn't even waste my breath in reminding him that Kumagae himself had had a stiff match in the morning that day before meeting Niles.

But *hana yori dango;* rather than the flower of modest adjectives, almost any chronicler or critic would taste the dumpling of actual test and personal observation. Therefore, I watched him rather keenly make his leisurely way through the invitation tournament of the Crescent Athletic Club at Bay Ridge. Frankly, his showing was disappointing. There was none of that mystic mixture of sheer madness and the light of heaven which flashes from the racquets of McLoughlin and of Murray—not even a remote hint of it. Neither was there about his game that polished perfection of technique that is Williams's. He just plodded on like an old, steady, dependable dray horse. Steady—he was that; also his placement was excellent. That was his forte. It must be said, however, that his play gave the onlookers a singular sense of something he was not exactly wearing on the sleeve, but had up his sleeve all the same. It was that which made us all rather anxious to see him stand up against a man like R. Lindley Murray, for example. And he did on Sunday, the 13th of August, in the final match of the tournament. Murray won it in straight sets. But nobody went away with the impression that Murray just fooled about the court and took his ease.

An incident occurred. I think, although I am not sure, that it was in that eighth game in the second set which gave a violent cocktail to the nervous systems of the spectators. Murray was close at the net. Kumagae shot a vicious 'cross-court right at the feet of Murray. Murray chopped at it an inch or two above the ground. The ball flirted gently over the net, and with a weary little sigh fell on Kumagae's side for a perfect and absolutely unanswerable point. Immediately and without hesitation the umpire gave the point to Murray. The tall form of the Californian rose to its full height in protest. Murray would not have it. From where I was I could not hear him distinctly. His contention seemed to be that the ball struck the ground after touching his racquet and before going over the net. The umpire was incredulous. He well might be. It happened right under his very eyes within a few yards of his perch. If, as Murray contended, the ball struck the ground it must have done so at the same time as the rim of his racquet struck the grass. Anyway, Murray seemed to be the only mortal who saw the ball behave as he claimed it did, although there were several hundred pairs of eyes watching that particular ball rather keenly at the time. Murray was not excited or melodramatic about it in the least, but absolutely firm on the point. The umpire was helpless. The point went to Kumagae.

I do not know just how this incident affected the American spectators. To a little group of us heathen it was no longer a mere game of tennis we were looking at. I was sitting next to a young man who graduated from the same university in Tokio as Kumagae did and in the same class with him. He will enter Harvard this fall.

"Domo kanshin desu ne!" said he to me. "We may brag as much as we please about what we can do in Japan. But . . . but that is beyond us. There is a bigness about the American that dwarfs us."

He was not talking about six foot and some inches of Murray's altitude either: he was simply overwhelmed with the splendor and majesty of the "American sense of fair play."

And who shall say just how far this sort of thing would not go? This single incident made an impression upon the young Japanese student which the Declaration of Independence and the Sermon on the Mount repeated by a thousand missionaries to Japan could never make—not in a thousand years. Doubtless this same young man, as he goes through his academic course at Harvard, will read some of the anti-Japanese editorials of Hearst papers. But no power on earth can convince him that a real American is writing such stuff. More than once a Harvard graduate has held the portfolio of a Cabinet Minister in Japan. Suppose this same young student who saw the match were to develop into a future Foreign Minister of Japan? Suppose, also, a critical climax in the Japanese-American relations were to come to a head while he is at the helm of state? There is no prophet wise enough to tell us how small or big is the meaning of a little incident such as we saw in the Murray-Kumagae tilt.

Having this sort of thing in mind, I asked Kumagae how he had been treated since he came to America.

He grinned in answer.

"Of course, I had heard a lot about the American sportsman before I sailed," said he; "his sense of fair play and square deal, and all that, you know. The American doesn't play fair at all, as a matter of fact. He cheats himself right along. The sternest knocker of the American is the American. American spectators seem to be always hunting for the smallest excuse to applaud my play. Most certainly they applaud me ten times more than they applaud the play of any of their own countrymen. You know things are not like that in Japan. When I played Mr. Griffin at the Tokio Club the crowd did applaud some exceptional exhibitions of Mr. Griffin's skill. But it seemed to go hard with the crowd to do so. Here I always get the benefit of a doubtful point. I do not speak English well: I do not wish to make myself ridiculous in protesting. But I feel like doing it often."

Well, Kumagae has been beaten four times now. But it must be a great satisfaction—indeed, a positive pleasure to be beaten by such a clean sportsman as R. Lindley Murray, for example. With all that, taking it by and large, Kumagae has been playing the game like a man of genius. Consider the circumstances: consider also the youth of his tennis career. There is no question about it: his tennis is commanding the respect of the mystic topmost ten of the ranking players in America.

Besides, he is doing corking good work in another line. He is showing some of our good American friends that the Japanese are not altogether a race of spies and sneak thieves, wife-beaters, infantile paralysis incubators, liars and donkeys and enthusiastic lunatics, as the Hearst papers are telling millions of Americans almost every day. He has shown himself a human being—just a human boy who suffers from the enlargement of the dome under the hat sometimes, precisely like American youngsters of his age. And just like them, too, gets profoundly sobered in his estimate of himself when his betters put him where he belongs.

He has made a lot of friends in America. Even the newspaper reporters say many a kind thing of him without suffering from the dislocation of their conscience. And that, I take it, is something of an achievement on the part of a young gentleman who has an infinitely tougher battle to wage against this linguistic inferno which the humorist calls the King's English than he has against the cracks of the courts.